

## THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT

Luke 21:1-4

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A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson  
Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA  
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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

In my years of preaching I've discovered three topics cause great anxiety; sex, death, and probably the most difficult of all to deal with it - money. Most people consider the topic of money a very private, extremely personal matter. Never ask someone how much they paid for a new car, or dress, or shoes. It's rude. Never ask, "How much do you make a year?" Remember years ago on the *Tonight* show a guest asked Johnny Carson how much he got paid a year. Carson, uncharacteristically, got serious. He responded, "My parents taught me that it's impolite to ask how much money someone makes." The guest immediately switched the subject to something less forbidden. Most of us believe, rightly or wrongly, that money, like sex, is a private matter. "Don't you dare tell me what I should do with my money."

Considering what a forbidden topic money is, I find it surprising to see Jesus, in our Gospel lesson, watching how much people place in the offering plate. How rude! Imagine how offended you'd be if I told you about the people sitting in the balcony with spy glasses looking at how much you put in the offering? But Jesus does what's forbidden. He observes what people put in the offering plate. He sees people putting their money in. He sees a little old widow contribute two copper coins. He says, "This poor widow has put in more than all of them, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on." She gave more because, unlike the rich, she gave everything.

Tom Tewell told the story of a man in his home church who gave a *Minute for Mission* to encourage people to make a generous annual pledge. He was the wealthiest man in the congregation and gave the largest amount of money. "I remember the day I earned my first

dollar," he said. "I was so proud! I went to church that night to hear a missionary. The missionary encouraged everybody to make a generous to missions "I was faced with a bitter choice," he said. "All I had was my dollar bill. When the collection plate came to me, I put in all I had. My life was forever changed that night," he said. "God blessed me for <sup>giving</sup> putting all I had. Because I put everything I had in, God made me a multimillionaire," he said. He returned to his pew. Everybody was in awe of this multimillionaire. A poor little widow sitting in the pew behind him leaned forward and whispered loudly so everybody could hear, "I dare you to do it again."

You see - the more we make, the richer we are - the more difficulty we have in giving. Poor people give a higher percentage of their money to charity than rich. Poll after poll prove it. Poor people are more apt to tithe than wealthy people. The average American contributes about 2.5 percent of their annual income to charity. Poor people give *less money* - but they give a *higher percentage*. Maybe poor people know better than rich people the value of giving. They know it's more blessed to give than to receive.

*Speakers of value - None ---*

There's a big difference between the value and price of something. The poet Oscar Wilde defined a cynical person as someone who knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing. Do we know the difference between the *value* and the *price* of something? We know how much our mortgage costs. We know the cost of a car payment. But what's the value of being a member of Christ's family? What's the value of Christian education? What's the value of a worship service or shut-in communion? What's the value of being a member of a family that shares your joys and sorrows? What is really valuable? The poor widow in our Gospel story knew the value of her relationship to God. She knew her relationship to God wasn't something she could earn or buy but she knew was worth giving all she had

Unlike The parable --

A lot of us are afraid to let go. Joe Garagiola, the former major league baseball player and television personality, tells the story of catching in a game when the legendary Stan Musial of the St. Louis Cardinals came to bat. It was a make or break moment in the game. Garagiola, being the catcher, knew the young pitcher had never seen Musial up close. He knew the pitcher was uptight about the man standing at the plate. He signaled for a fastball, but the pitcher said, "No!" He signaled for a slider but the pitcher said, "No!" Then he called for a knuckleball. The pitcher shook that call off. Then he called for the favorite pitch of the young pitcher, a change-up. But the pitcher said, "No!" So Garagiola went out to the mound and said, "Listen, I've called for every pitch you've got. What do you want to throw?" The young pitcher said, "Nothing! I just want to hold on to the ball as long as I can" (Frank Harrington, Peach Tree Presbyterian Church). Listen, the time has come for us to give what we've got. We can't spend our lives holding on to what we've been given by God to put to use. I urge you to give all you've got! Don't hold back! If the Gospel of Jesus Christ is worth anything at all to you - it's worth giving all you've got.

A man and his wife attended a memorial service for the son of friends of theirs. It was a service where a stained glass window in a chapel was being dedicated in memory of their son, who had been killed in the war in Vietnam. The window had cost \$50,000. As they sat there and experienced the service, the wife turned to her husband and said: They have done a beautiful thing in memory of their son. Her husband agreed that it was a beautiful thing. She then faced her husband and said: What are we going to do? He was shocked and said to her: What are you talking about? We don't need to do anything. Our son came back alive. She said, "That's the point I'm making. Our friends lost their son and they've given a window costing \$50,000 in his memory. Our son came back and we're doing nothing (Frank Harrington)."

*I'm asking you to do something*

I'm going to ask you, again, to make a pledge to Jesus Christ through Oxford Presbyterian

Church. You may be hesitating. Maybe you're a high school or college kid. Maybe you're a widow living on a fixed income. Maybe you're saying, "I'd be embarrassed because I don't have much to pledge." The amount doesn't matter if you're giving all you've got as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Give what you have! The little you give may be far more valuable in Christ's eyes than the great sums others give out of their abundance. Don't miss the blessing!

The amount we give is between you and God. Would you fill out a pledge card as a symbolic way of saying, God I love you. Your investment might be only a dollar a week, but Jesus Christ can take that dollar and multiply it beyond what you could ever imagine. Many years ago Helen Keller said, "I don't want to spend my life, I want to invest it. I want to invest it in something that will last. I want to invest it in eternity." An investment in the ministry of Jesus Christ is going to last. Make an investment through this church. "Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."